

Cannon Blast



Keeping the families of Fires Brigade, 4th Infantry Division informed.

Vol. 1, Issue 2

March 20, 2006



Soldiers kick off spring in Iraq

Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, Fires Brigade, enjoy the sunrise and an aerobics class led by Command Sgt. Maj. Gilbert Canuela.

Iron Gunner 6 sends...

Hello to all the Iron Gunner families and friends,

As I pen these thoughts, we find ourselves a quarter of the way through this deployment.

I want to start out this note by saying how very proud Command Sgt. Maj. Gilbert Canuela and I are of our rear detachments and family readiness groups.

The devotion, dedication and accomplishments of the family readiness groups, our families and friends is unmatched – the best I've ever seen.

You are all doing so well and you should know that your self reliance and support to our Soldiers contributes to our continued mission success. Keep up the great work. I am confident that you will continue in your winning ways.

The Soldiers of the brigade continue to work long hours each day preparing for missions such as convoys, working in the brigade tactical operations center or division command and control center, turning wrenches to keep the division on the road, or supporting the Corps with rocket and missile fires.

Rest assured, we are all staying busy.

All of the hard work and the many constant missions make this time away from all of you go by rather quickly.

Although all of us work hard,



By
Col. Allen Batschelet

time remains for us to conduct physical training, write letters and attend church and Morale, Welfare and Recreation activities like comedy tours.

For some of you, your troopers have or are on their way home for rest and recuperation leave. This is a great break for them as they get to see you and have some time relax. We continue to work towards getting all of our troopers

home for leave.

As we continue our mission here in Iraq, the summer months are coming up. I know that some of you may be concerned about the high temperatures here in the summer.

Although it does get very hot here, you can be confident that all measures to keep your troopers cool are in place.

Everyone has air conditioning in their living and work areas and there are abundant supplies of cold water, Gatorade and other sports drinks to keep all of us healthy and cool in the hot times ahead.

We are all very well taken care of and have more than adequate living conditions.

Once again, I want to thank all of the families, friends and spouses of the Fires Brigade for your support to one another, our brigade and our nation. The Brigade Rear Detachment command team stands ready to assist you when needed.

Thanks for all you do.

Headquarters Battery still focused on fitness

Hello to the family and friends of the Hard Rock battery.

To those who don't know me, I am 1st Lt. Max Fuldauer, the battery executive officer.

I'd like to open this article by saying how proud I am of every Soldier, non-commissioned officer and officer of the battery. Our strength comes through the hard work and dedication of these individuals.

Over the last month, the Soldiers have had their noses to the grindstone and with personnel spread across the division, our NCOs are really exercising some creative leadership styles in order to accomplish every mission. We've settled into a battle rhythm which keeps us quite busy, and that, my friends, is a good thing.

We all really appreciate our days off now.

Since our last newsletter, we have conducted a variety of missions. Some mundane, some exciting, they are all critical to the success of the Fires Brigade and the 4th Infantry Division.

Our most frequent mission is still the convoys we conduct into the International Zone (IZ), which is also known as the Green Zone. I have to tell you, that it is quite an experience. The number of nations that have representatives from political and military institutions is amazing.

We have begun a comprehensive physical training pro-

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An explanation of all that extra money...

Plus, Soldiers recognized for pre-deployment efforts

**By Warrant Officer One
Arnold Guzman
Human Resources Technician**

February was a short month, and it was also a busy one for all of us here in the Fires Brigade S-1 Office.

This past month, we held a promotion board, a soldier of the month board and an awards ceremony. The Fires Brigade Soldier of the month winner was Spc. James McCoy.

During the awards ceremony, we presented seven Army

Commendation Medals and 14 Army Achievement Medals to some very deserving Soldiers.

The awards were given to the following Soldiers in recognition of their hard work and tireless efforts during the Fires Brigade's preparation for the deployment: Staff Sgt. LaTrece Peterson, Sgt. Kelly P. Stewart, Cpl. Donald Barrow, Warrant Officer One Lionel Marco III, 1st Lt. Maxwell Fuldauer, Sgt. 1st Class John Coleman, Master Sgt. Rodney Byus, Sgt. 1st Class Mark

Branch, Sgt. 1st Class James Herron, Sgt. Matthew Edmonds, Sgt. Melisha McCane, Pfc. Alex Bloyed, Cpl. Doug Myers, Pfc. Katrina Wiltz, Cpl. Lori Segers, Cpt. Richard Ward, Cpl. Christopher Fernandez, Pfc. Cory Jarels, Pfc. Khalisha Grant, and Sgt. Patricia Matos. Congratulations are in order for these fine Soldiers.

We also referred a number of Soldiers with financial questions to the 230th Finance Battalion, which provides finance support. This support includes emergency casual payments, check cashing, pay inquiry

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S-2 Soldiers on the move

**By Master Sgt. Rodney Byus
S-2 NCOIC**

February was a very busy month for the S-2 shop. We gained new Soldiers, exchanged Soldiers with Division and sent a Soldier on leave.

Pvt2 Kristin Blair departed to Germany on her environmental morale leave. Her days were mostly spent in Germany, but she did get to Torino, Italy for a weekend. She and Spc. Allison Churchill, public affairs, managed to catch a bit of the Olympic Snowboarding Competition, the only event game that the United States medaled in the day the Soldiers ventured into the mountains of Italy. Perhaps they brought luck to the competitors!

The brigade commander recognized Master Sgt. Rodney Byus and Sgt. 1st Class John Coleman for their hard work during the convoy from Kuwait to Iraq. They were both recognized for their outstanding leadership skills and their tireless dedication to duty during a time of hectic yet critical training. Byus received the Army Commendation Medal and Coleman received the Army Achievement Medal.

Our shop has grown over the past month with the arrival of Sgt. Bradford Oliver and Spc. Samuel Atkins, both topographi-

cal analysts. Atkins is working up at division headquarters, while Oliver has been receiving some instruction and training as to how things get done here in the 2 shop from Spc. Sean Hefflin. They have both been very busy getting our vehicles into tip-top shape and helping the topographical team up at Division Headquarters.

The Brigade held their first Operations and Intelligence Olympics where Pfc. Rachael Nadeau, another S-2 Soldier, won by scoring the highest on the test. Congrats! She is definitely a shining star this month as she has also been nominated to compete in the soldier of the month boards for March! Show 'em what you got, girl!

As quick as they arrive to the shop, so it seems they leave. Capt. Jewell Hoscila and Nadeau will be departing the shop to move to division to take on a counter fire job. The division is getting some #1 picks. We will miss them both dearly.

However, we aren't worried! Capt. Richard Ward and Pvt2 Ryan Stowell will join the S-2 shop and we are confident we will not skip a beat. Welcome back!

A couple of our team members are visiting loved ones back in the states: Coleman and Spc. Matthew Wilson.

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CSM thanks families near and far

Our families contribute directly to the war effort in a very profound way.

Soldiers often have two families; their families at home and their fellow Soldiers. Both can provide significant morale support.

I know personally that I do not endure this deployment alone—even the most senior NCO needs support and inspiration when things don't go as planned. Behind the scenes there are spouses, children, parents, brothers and sisters who have offered support along this mission.

Thanks for sticking with your loved ones. For the spouses and children in particular, thanks for sharing your Soldier with the Fires Brigade, 4th Infantry Division and the Iraqi people. We owe you a debt of gratitude.

To our Rear-Detachment, Family Readiness Group and our family, on behalf of your grateful Soldiers, "Thank You" for answering the call to support your Army at war—we will never forget your sacrifice.

**Gilbert L. Canuela
Soldier**



S-4 keeping Soldiers equipped

By Cpl. Sisily Eager
Fires Bde. S-4

The Fires Brigade S-4 is continuously busy, whether working with special guests or ensuring the brigade is well-equipped.

Our month began with Cpl. Sisily Eager re-enlisting, and having Vice Chief of Staff General Richard Cody administer the oath. The highlight of the re-enlistment is the tax-free bonus Eager is receiving for her commitment to the Army.

Staff Sgt. James Donald is constantly working on installing armor upgrades in the brigade's M1114 HMMWVs.

Warrant Officer One Lionel Marco has been working with S-2's Sgt. 1st Class John Coleman, to get us through our "retrofit" stage. This is when we turn in all of our Class III armored trucks and exchange them for Class II armored trucks.

Master Sgt. Shelly Gonsalves and Eager have been working on the Army Direct Ordering system, trying to get it up and running for the brigade. This has been one of

the main focuses of the month.

The ADO system is a uniform swapping and supplementation program that allows the Soldiers to maintain serviceable gear. The process, like anything new to the Army, has had its share of obstacles and challenges.

Gonsalves and Eager's main focus has been trying to get all the deployed units within the brigade loaded into the system. This will allow individuals to begin ordering the items they need.

In addition to a few other glitches, the ADO server crashed around Feb. 28. As stated earlier; like all things new to the Army, it takes some time to iron out issues and work out all the kinks.

Sgt. Kurt Gullens continues to work on facility improvements. He never seems to be too far from Command Sgt. Maj. Gilbert Canuela or Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin Jones's reach.

Eager and Gullens have both been studying for upcoming promotion boards, as well as soldier of the month/quarter. Soon all the stress will be worth it.



Warrant Officer One Lionel Marco at the retrograde site.

The section also takes turns working to fix our forward operating base runner. The FOB runner is a run down M998 (HMMWV) that was assigned to us when we got here. We continue to put in endless hours to correct maintenance issues; especially since it is our only form of transportation.

Last, but not least, we congratulate Marco; he received an Army Commendation Award for his hard work during the modularity transformation and deployment of the Fires Brigade.

Medics train Soldiers to save buddies



Photo by Capt. Jim Silverstrim, medical plans officer, Fires Bde.

By Capt. Jim Silverstrim
Medical plans officer

Another busy month for the Fires Brigade medics in Iraq has come and gone.

Taking care of the medical needs of the Fires Bde. continues to be both challenging and rewarding. Now that we have settled in, we've been able to add additional training for ourselves and the rest of the brigade onto our schedule.

The primary focus of brigade medical training was combat lifesaver classes. Both the Headquarters and 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery medical platoons have conducted this training in the last month.

Having CLS certified soldiers has a great impact on the health of the unit as well as its morale. Soldiers want to learn how to treat an injured fellow Soldier and it makes you more confident in performing your job when you know the Soldier next to you can save your life.

We've trained over 40 soldiers in this key lifesaving class in the past three weeks. Sgt Angelina Marrero has been the primary instructor for the headquarters platoon and she has done a great job.

On a more personal level, two of our medics chose

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Pfc. Heather Braley, chemical equipment repair, Company B, 589th Brigade Support Battalion, practices sticking Cpl. Saul Trevino, medic/personal security detachment, Fires Brigade, with Sgt. 1st Class James Walck, medical platoon non-commissioned officer in charge, Fires Bde. supervising.

324th NSC shines light on 'spotlight' Soldier

By 1st Lt. Amber Spain
324th NSC XO

What is the definition of a Spotlight Soldier? A Spotlight Soldier is someone that goes the extra mile, someone that goes above and beyond the call of duty. A Spotlight Soldier is Sgt. Randy Shilton.

Shilton is the enhanced position location reporting system network manager non-commissioned officer in charge for the 324th Network Support Company. Shilton is in charge of mentoring, coaching, and developing three EPLRS network manager operators.

He also monitors all the EPLRS in the network to ensure they are synchronized. If an EPLRS joins another network he troubleshoots it from the ENM laptop. If he receives no resolution he immediately contacts division.

Another reason we spotlight Shilton is for his stepping up to take care of the contact team that conducts a weekly quality assurance and quality control inspection of communications systems in Headquarters and Headquarters Battery and Battery Alpha, 26th Field Artillery vehicles.



Photo by Spc. Allison Churchill, Fires Bde. PAO

Sgt. Randy Shilton during combat lifesaver training. The multi-skilled Soldier is 324th NSC's Spotlight Soldier.

Shilton not only performs the QA/QC inspections on the digital systems, but he also shows the operators of the vehicles how to troubleshoot the system in case they encounter problems on a convoy.

Shilton also prepares the brigade for convoys. A day prior to a convoy's departure he conducts a full preventive maintenance checks

and services on all communication systems in the vehicles.

It usually takes up to 1-2 hours per vehicle to conduct a thorough PMCS. If he encounters a problem and has to troubleshoot the communication equipment it can take additional hours.

Shilton works diligently until all communication systems in the vehicles are fully mission capable.

Shilton also checks communication systems one hour prior to a convoy's departure. He ensures all the Force XXI Battle Command, Brigade-and-Below systems can send and receive text messages and that the Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System can perform radio checks.

Our Spotlight Soldier also ensures everyone in Fires Brigade understands their communications systems. He regularly teaches troops within the brigade the finer details of the ENM and FBCB2. His mix of classroom briefing and hands-on experience has won praise from the chain of command.

Shilton is one of a kind. He is a dedicated professional who continuously excels in his profession. For these reasons, he is 324th NSC's Spotlight Soldier.

S-6 finds reasons to celebrate even in war zone

By Master Sgt. Trevor Jones
S-6 NCOIC

If you've served in the military for any length of time, you know that near real time communications on the battlefield are important to the success of any military operation. The same is true in Fires Brigade. In order to communicate more effectively on the battlefield, the brigade needs a system that is reliable on convoys.

The Blue Force Tracker is a digital command and control system that provides on the move, near real time, situational awareness to the vehicle mounted platform level. The systems share text messages and other information with other Blue Force Tracker equipped units across the battlefield. The Blue Force Tracker network provides com-

manders the ability to digitally control and monitor their subordinate unit's status and position.

Master Sgt. Trevor Jones, communication non-commissioned officer in charge, Sgt. Patricia Matos, signal service support NCO, and Spc. Damian Wilson, signal support specialist, were given the task of converting a M1114 (up armored Humvee) belonging to Battery A, 26th Field Artillery, from the Force Battlefield Command Brigade and Below to the Blue Force Tracker.

It's not an easy process to swap communication systems from one vehicle to another. Matos and Wilson worked tirelessly to make sure that all communications components of the vehicles were working properly before the swapping of both Army Battle Command Systems. Wilson and Matos also

made sure all cables and hardware were cleaned and serviceable.

During the installation process Wilson and Matos installed the Blue Force Tracker System within one day. The target acquisition battery is now better able to complete its mission of tracking activity throughout the division area of responsibility.

Continuing through the month of February the S-6 shop continued to stay, very busy by giving communication training and sending Jones to Warlock (CREW) training. This training is a valuable tool that will be used to save Soldiers lives on convoys.

Jones and Sgt. Barron Rhodes, data system integrator, also had a pre-change of command inventory layout, during which they displayed all of their military equipment so the

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Tax time is upon us...or is it?

By Staff Sgt. Jason Burke
Legal NCOIC, Fires Bde.

As April 15 approaches, many Americans find themselves pouring through their prior year's financial documents and reading over Internal Revenue Service forms and publications in order to meet the Federal Income Tax filing deadline. This can be even more strenuous if you are separated from your spouse due to a deployment.

Well, you can relax knowing that the Internal Revenue Code § 7508(a) provides for an extension of time to perform certain acts if the individual is serving in the Armed Forces or in support of the Armed Forces in a combat zone, area "in direct support of" a combat zone, qualified hazardous duty area or hospitalized as a result of injury received while serving in such area. In general, the deadlines for performing certain actions applicable to taxes are extended for the period of service in the above mentioned areas, plus 180 days after the last day in the area. The extension also includes the time in the hospital, not to exceed five years if hospitalized



Staff Sgt.
Jason Burke

in the United States. The extensions apply not only to those serving in the combat zone but also to the spouse in most cases.

The extension for filing an income tax return is 180 days from the last day in the qualified zone plus the period of time in the zone between Jan. 1 and April 15. Thus if a soldier entered the combat zone on Feb. 1, 2005 and remains until after April 15, he or she is entitled to an extension of time for filing his or her 2004 federal income tax return until 254 days after he leaves the combat zone (180 + 74 [the number of days between February 1 and April 15]).

In the event that an individual entitled to the combat zone extensions reenters a combat zone before the prior extension period has expired, a new 180 day period will begin after the individual leaves the combat zone for the second time.

Additionally, any time (of the days between 1 Jan and 15 April) remaining on the first extension will be added to the new 180-day period.

For example, if a Soldier served in Afghanistan from April 1 to Aug. 31, 2004 and then deployed to Iraq on March 5, 2005 he is entitled to an extension of time for filing and paying his or her 2003 income taxes of 195 days (180 plus the 15 day period that was left before the April 15 deadline).

This extension period would have expired on March 14, 2005 (195 days from Sept. 1 2004, the first day out of the combat zone). Because the extension period had not expired for the 2003 tax year before he or she re-entered a combat zone, he or she will have 190 days (180 days plus 10 of the 15 days remaining before the April 15, 2004 deadline) after he leaves Iraq to file his or her 2003 taxes. The extension also applies to the payment of any federal income tax. Assessment and collection deadlines will be extended and interest and penalties attributable to the Please see **LEGAL**, page 11

Fires Bde. appoints new 'Master Fitness Blaster'

Soldiers of the 4th Fires Brigade have been hitting the gym regularly lately. In this harsh environment, maintaining a high level of fitness keeps your mind, body and spirit elevated.

Leading the way in the fitness kick is Maj. Andy Weatherstone, S-3, Fires Bde. Over the last three months he has reduced his body fat from 21 to 8 percent. A remarkable improvement!

His great condition is being noticed by soldiers throughout the brigade.

"It gives us all a goal to shoot for; he really has turned on the heat!" said Maj. Richard Watson, rear operations center operations officer, 4th Inf. Div.

"Few people intimidate me on a physical level, but Maj. Weatherstone does. He is what right looks like," said Capt. Damon

Wells, commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery.

Weatherstone is a die-hard physical training guru. He can be spotted at the 4th Inf. Div. gym, frequently cheering on the smaller, less fit Soldiers.

His gut bursting cries of "Bring the pain, Baby!" and "If it don't HURT, it don't WORK!" are enough to motivate the laziest of gym-goers.

He jumps from machine to machine in a fury that must be seen to believe. A typical workout for "Mr. 8 percent," as Weatherstone is known all over Camp Liberty, lasts around two hours. He finds time in his busy schedule to make the gym his home away from home.

While his peers are busy getting soft and squishy behind a keyboard, he is mastering the "chi" of the weight room.

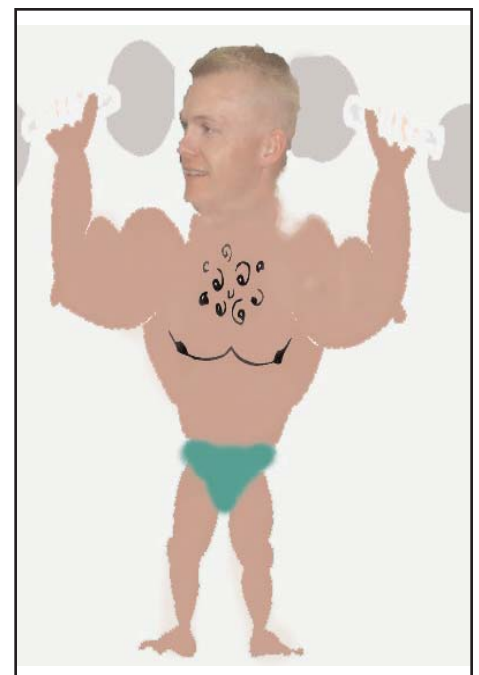


Photo art created by Spc. Allison Churchill, Fires Bde. PAO



Army focuses on educating committed Soldiers

By Sgt. 1st Class Mark Kirkland
Brigade Career Counselor

Fires Brigade Retention has seen many new changes to policy, and some new incentives hit the street.

The III Corps commander recently updated the highly regarded Education Incentive Policy Letter to make provisions for deployed Soldiers.

The policy announces new requirements for Soldiers reenlisting for three or more years under Option 2 (Current Station Stabilization) in a deployed area. These Soldiers must go see an education counselor within 60 days of return from deployment and start courses within six months of return.

The Fort Hood Education Incentive Form will be signed prior to reenlistment and brought to the education center.

This is a great program for Soldiers and an awesome way to advance your careers.

Another way the Army is shaping our future leaders through education.

A total of 31 Fires Brigade Soldiers re-enlisted in February. A lucky seven of those were sworn in by Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Richard A. Cody on February 13. In all over \$350,000 in bonus money was paid out for the month.

Stay dedicated and committed. "Stay Iron Gunners," "Stay Army"!

Section successfully rejoins A/26 FA

By Capt. Albert Bossar
A/26 FA Commander

Hello to the all friends and family of the Wolfpack!

As we finish the fourth month in the deployment, we are finally settling in and getting into a steady battle rhythm.

This month has been one of promotions, re-enlistments and awards. I take great honor and privilege in being a part of such activities. All were well deserved by those recognized.

The battery re-enlisted Pfc. Allen Jones from the maintenance team and Sgt. Brian Hendrix from our attached 3-16 FA Radar Section.

We also presented more than 18 Good Conduct Medals.

As I mentioned in the last article, I would like to profile a different Wolfpack section or team each month.

This month I would like to focus on the accomplishments of Radar Section 1. First Section deployed earlier than the battery main body and began operations at Camp Taji starting in October; they rejoined the Battery in January.

The section has done a stellar job both apart from the unit and on Camp Liberty.

The 1st Section had a hard mission in deploying early, separating from the 4th Infantry Division and attaching to another division for over six weeks.

Nevertheless, they performed
Please see A/26 page 11



Photo by Capt. Albert Bossar, commander A/26 FA

Back, from left: Spc. Daniel Zupan, Sgt. Joel Lewis, Spc. Juan Paul Pirez. Front: Spc. Gary Farrell, Spc. Ronald Sampson. All are part of Section 1, Battery A, 26th Field Artillery.

Nourishing spirit important as body, mind

By Staff Sgt. Michael Miles
Brigade Chaplain NCO

There are three areas of the human life: the body, the mind and the spirit. All of these areas need to be fed and exercised in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The body requires proper nutrition. We can nourish our bodies by eating the right foods.

The body also requires exercise. In garrison, the Army provides Soldiers an hour each day to get a good workout. Here in Iraq, we have several gyms and classes available to stay fit.

Proper nutrition and exercise has been proven to reduce unhealthy stress as well, which is important when far from home.

The mind needs nourishment and exercise, too. By attending school, you feed your mind with vital information. Studying and putting the information to use keeps the mind sharp.

The Army has a leadership reading list to help and

assist us with development of leadership traits and abilities.

But what about your spirit? How do you feed and keep the spiritual part of your being fit?

Scripture states in Acts 2:42, say *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* That is how you feed and energize your spirit.

So when you think about how you eat or exercise to take care of your body, when you think about which college course to take or what novel to read, remember to also take care of your spirit. Think about what you are going to do for your spirit in order to make you more complete.

I encourage you to find a church and learn from the teachings. Find a friend in the church to break bread and fellowship with. Most of all, communicate with God with prayer.

God Bless You as you provide for your body, mind and spirit.

HCB, cont'd from pg. 2

gram and this month we began conducting our record Army Physical Fitness Tests. Let me just say that the good food around here is starting to show.

Thankfully, all the Soldiers are motivated and most are exercising with an extreme level of enthusiasm. For most of us, it is the best use of little extra time we have and a great stress reliever.

Another great training venue we began was the combat lifesaver course. Sgt. Angelina Marrero has been busy instructing these classes, giving Soldiers from all over the brigade the skills to render advanced "buddy aid."

Great NCO's like Sgt. 1st Class John Coleman and soldiers like Spc. Sean Hefflin conducted some outstanding weapons skills classes. Soldiers learned the details of every weapon system in the battery, including the M2 Machine Gun, the Mk19 Automatic Grenade Launcher, and the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon.

Sgt. Patricia Matos gave an in-depth class on some of the digital communications equipment in the up-armored Humvees.

Of special note, the Fires Brigade began a Soldier competition, Iraq Olympics, this month, and our very own Pfc. Rachel Nadeau scored the highest score on the pre-

miere event, an operations and intelligence test.

All of these valuable classes were executed to the highest of standards in the "Hard Rock" tradition.

February saw our Soldiers make contributions in other areas.

This month we had the honor of reenlisting many great Soldiers including Spc. Anna Johnson, Sgt. William Rassman, Spc. Timothy Peters and Spc. Larry Mellette.

We also had the privilege of promoting some fine Soldiers this month. All of these fine troopers are definitely worthy of the increased responsibility that comes with the rank.

We promoted Cpl. Fahad Jaha to sergeant, Spc. Christopher Theroux to sergeant, Spc. Donald Barrow to corporal, and Pvt2s Michael Robinson, Jonathan Cook and Eduardo Gutierrez private first class.

Since these Soldiers' promotions they have done nothing but lived up to the greater expectations of their leaders.

Each month we will focus on a soldier, starting this month with Pfc. Joseph Baudhuin. He is a 19-year-old air traffic controller, working at the division rear operations center radio and trafficking systems operator. The radio calls from con-

voys all over Baghdad tend to keep him focused, as they are sometimes deadly serious.

The conspicuous absence of traditional weekends and holidays calls for some creative recreation in order to break up the monotony. Baudhuin takes college courses, goes to the gym and studies for Soldier boards.

Baudhuin would like to convey to those at home that he really misses his family and friends and wants to thank all those that support him through www.anysoldier.com.

He would also like to say "HI" to his wife, Caitlin, and his little sister, Jessica. Baudhuin calls the women his "strength" and says he loves them and can't wait to get home.

Those words stand true for all of us here in the Hard Rock Battery. Thanks again to all of you for all of your support and we'll be home before we know it.

By the way, don't forget about our video teleconferences for all of you who are near Fort Hood. These are a fun way to see and talk to your loved ones from across the world. If you have any questions, please contact our family readiness group leader, Andrea Wells.

Now I have to get back to work...

HARD ROCK!

S-1, cont'd from pg. 3

support, currency conversions, accepting travel vouchers and other financial issues.

The following are some of the financial entitlements and support that Fires Brigade Soldiers can expect:

Per Diem: Soldiers deployed in support of OIF under a temporary change station orders and/or unit movement orders are entitled to a per diem rate of \$3.50. Soldiers are required to complete and submit a final travel settlement voucher (DD Form 1351-2) upon return to receive the per diem entitlement.

Hardship Duty Pay- Location: All soldiers deployed to Kuwait/Iraq more than 30 days in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom are entitled to HDP-L. This entitlement is payable on a daily basis and begins the day of arrival at these locations and stops the day of departure. HDP-L is based on a soldier's duty location. Fires Brigade soldiers are entitled to \$100.00.

Family Separation Allowance: All Soldiers with dependents are entitled to FSA-II when separated from their dependent for more than 30 days (provided the dependents resided with the member prior to the deployment) while in a TCS status away from the permanent duty station (i.e., deployed in support of OIF).

A member married to another member with no dependent is entitled to FSA-II, provided the couple resided together prior to the deployment (only one member is entitled if both are deployed).

FSA-II is payable at \$250.00 per month (\$3.33 per day) and begins on the day of departure from home station and ends the day prior to arrival back at the home station.

Hostile Fire Pay: HFP is authorized for the total land and airspace of Kuwait/Iraq. This entitlement begins the day of arrival and ends on the day of departure. However, it pays for the entire month, regardless of day of departure. This entitlement is payable at \$225.00 a month. Soldiers present for official duty, in Kuwait and Iraq for one day during the month are authorized the entire \$225.00 for that month.

Combat Zone Tax Exclusion: CZTE is authorized in support of

Operation Iraqi Freedom for the total land/area and airspace of Kuwait and Iraq. All enlisted Soldiers present for official duty in Iraq or Kuwait for one or more days are federal tax exempt for all federal tax earned for the entire month.

For officers, exemption is limited to the maximum enlisted pay per month plus HFP. For 2005 this amount is \$6,529.20. Officer's income earned beyond this amount is fully taxable.

The entitlement begins the day of arrival in the designated area and ends on the day of departure. However, all applicable entitlements exempted, are exempt for the entire month up to the ceiling.

Basic Allowance for Subsistence: BAS continues for all soldiers in receipt prior to deployment. Enlisted Soldiers in receipt of partial BAS at their permanent duty station will be authorized full BAS upon arrival in Kuwait and Iraq for the length of their deployment. The current BAS rates are \$187.49 a month for officers and \$272.26 a month for enlisted Soldiers.

Reenlistment Bonus: If the reenlistment contract awarding a bonus is signed while in the CZTE area, the bonus and anniversary payments are exempt from federal tax. Anniversary payments for a reenlistment outside the CZTE area will remain taxable even if paid in the CZTE area.

Savings Deposit Program: All service members in direct support of OIF are eligible for this program. SDP is a program where soldiers may deposit funds at the local finance office in an amount up to the monthly non-allotted take home pay (maximum \$10,000 total balance).

Although accrued interest may cause the overall balance to exceed \$10,000, interest is only earned on amounts up to \$10,000. The account will earn interest at 10% annum compounded quarterly.

Soldiers can apply for the SDP as soon as they arrive in country. Eligibility for SDP stops on the day of departure. Interest will stop accruing 90 days after redeployment. Should the 90th day fall on any day other than the last day of a month, interest will accrue through the last day of the preceding month.

To request money deposited in SDP soldiers on active duty must submit a written request to Defense Finance and Accounting Service – Cleveland Center (DFAS-CL), ATT-FN: Code FMCS, 1240 East 9th Street, Cleveland, OH 44199-2055.

Include name, social security number, and branch of service, redeployment date, amount requested and when the payment is desired. The payment will be sent to the soldier's financial institution, include the account number, type of account (checking or savings) and the routing number. A voided check or deposit slip will provide this information.

Also, indicate reason for the request (i.e. to close out the account because the 90 days after eligibility to deposit is over or you no longer wish to participate in the program).

Telephone inquiries concerning SDP accounts may be made to DFAS-CL. The stateside number is (216) 522-6545. A toll-free number for CONUS is 1-800-624-7368, DSN: 580-6545 or FAX (216) 522-6924.

Special Leave Accrual (SLA): Special Leave Accrual (SLA) allows soldiers to carry forward up to 90 days of leave at the end of the fiscal year (60 days ordinary leave plus 30 days Special Leave Accrual).

Personal Check Cashing Services: DOD military service members can cash personal checks upon presentation of valid identification. All personal checks cashed will have a signed statement on the back of the check authorizing immediate collection from the endorser's pay if the check is returned for insufficient funds or other reasons.

Personal checks and traveler's checks will be cashed up to a limit established by the Unit Commander. 230th Finance Battalion will cash U.S. Treasury checks, U.S. Postal Money Orders, and traveler's checks upon presentation of valid identification. Two-party checks, other than U.S. Treasury checks will not be cashed.

I hope this answers some of the questions you may have regarding finance entitlements. If you have any further questions, you may contact anyone in the Chain of Command, and they should be able to point you in the right direction.

S-2, cont'd from pg. 3

Wilson is expecting his first child, a boy. His son is due sometime between the second and third weeks of March!

We are so excited! We are waiting on pins and needles to see pictures of this new addition to not only his family, but to ours as well!

We have not forgotten about Chief Warrant Officer Three James Quick, who is representing the S-2 shop at the corps level, and our leader Maj. Bryan Gibby, who continues to track the battle from Division.

We miss them and we wish that all of our team members could be together through this year, but we also realize the great things that we are doing for our country even when we are apart.

We also wanted to say a great, big "Thank You" to all of our families and friends for all of the support that we've gotten while we've been out here! It really makes a difference!

And a special thanks goes out to SoldiersAngels.com as well as AnySoldier.com for all of the wonderful things that they have done to support the S-2 Shop out



Photo contributed by Master Sgt. Rodney Byus, S-2 NCOIC, Fires Bde.

Master Sgt. Rodney Byus, S-2 non-commissioned officer in charge, and Capt. Jewell Hoscala, fire and effects cell S-2 officer in charge, sit still long enough to pose for a picture with the mountain of coffee sent to the section from SoldiersAngels.com.

here in beautiful Baghdad!

They have made each and every day worth waking up to with the wonderfully rich supply

of coffee and all of the letters that let us know that there are many people who support the fight! Your efforts are truly appreciated!

S-6, cont'd from pg. 5

outgoing Headquarters and Headquarters Battery commander, Capt. Damon Wells, can inspect and inventory the equipment for serviceability and accountability.

Staff Sgt. Lisa Walters, data system integrator, also attended training in February. Walters attended the Vulnerability Assurance Program.

This is a computer based class that gave her the knowledge she needs to keep the brigade computers networked and safe from hackers and other network vulnerabilities.

Walters also received an Army Commendation Medal from Maj. Clarence White, signal officer, Fires Bde., for her hard work and leadership during the HHB deployment from Fort Hood and Joint Node Network validation.

Sgt. 1st Class John Terry, senior data integrator, was also very busy in February.

He single-handedly installed

several voice-over internet protocol phones for A/26th FA.

Now the battery can communicate effectively with their radar sites all over the division area of responsibility and with their families back in the United States.

The S-6 shop welcomed Staff Sgt. Robert Martinez as the newest member of the S-6 family.

Martinez permanently changed stations from Camp Humphrey, Korea, where he served as the 2-52nd Aviation Regiment (Heavy), 17th Aviation Brigade, communication non-commissioned officer in charge. He will serve as the Fires Brigade signal service support NCO.

Martinez reenlisted during a roof top ceremony after his arrival. The oath of enlistment was given by White, signal officer, Fires Bde.

Congratulations to Martinez! The Army has retained an outstanding NCO.

Even in combat birthdays are still celebrated.

Happy birthday to White, who celebrated his 37th birthday on Feb. 18 with several Soldiers from the S-6 shop and the battery.

The S-6 shop also sent their first soldier on environmental moral leave from Iraq.

Congratulations to Spc. Ariel Class, local area network manager, who went to Killeen to visit his mother and his daughter.

Congratulation to Matos, who received an Army Achievement Medal from Col. Allen Batschelet, the brigade commander.

She ensured the communication network at 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery (MLRS) was operating properly by verifying the correctness of all communication security keys.

Matos's technical knowledge resulted in the operation of the tactical network for the 2-20th FA.

LEGAL, cont'd from pg. 6

extension period will not be charged. Thus the Soldier mentioned above would not have to pay any taxes owed until 254 days after he or she leaves the combat zone.

If the Soldier is due a refund, however, he may wish to file earlier in order to receive the refund. Remember, the Internal Revenue Service does not pay any interest on the money they owe you on your tax return.

Military tax preparation offices are available both in the United States and Iraq for the convenience of Soldiers and their families. In order to file, you will need to bring in any W2s, 1099s, and any other pertinent financial documents from both spouses for filing plus a power of attorney, IRS Form 2848, that allows tax filing from your spouse.

A list of other time sensitive actions for which performance is postponed for members of the U.S. Armed Forces or individuals serving in support of a combat zone is available in Revenue Procedure 2002-71, which is available at www.irs.gov. The site also has Internal Revenue Notice 2003-21, "Tax Relief for those involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom" and Internal Revenue Publication 3, "Armed Forces Tax Guide" available.

For additional information, please contact the Fort Hood Tax Center located next to the Clear Creek Commissary at 287-3294. Soldiers in Iraq may stop by the Legal Services Office on Camp Liberty.

MEDICS, cont'd from pg. 4

to reenlist and one received individual recognition last month.

Spc. Larry Mellette and Spc. Timothy Peters made the commitment to continuing serving in the Army.

2nd Lt. Bryan French, the medical platoon leader, gave the oath of reenlistment in a combined ceremony at the Brigade headquarters.

"It was a great honor for me and I'm very proud of both Soldiers," said French.

Making the decision to remain in the Army can be a difficult decision, especially during a time of war, but both Mellette and Peters want to continue serving their country.

At the 589th Brigade Support Battalion, Staff Sgt. Christopher Parks received an award for the training he performed prior to the Fires Brigade deployment.

Capt. Jim Silverstrim presented Parks with the Army Accommodation Medal for combat lifesaver classes he taught last October and November.

Over the course of three weeks, he was the primary

instructor responsible for the certification of over 50 combat lifesavers in the Brigade. His hard work greatly improved the readiness and lifesaving capabilities of the Fires Brigade.

In the coming months, our medics will also begin training for the Expert Field Medical Badge.

Although testing for the EFMB won't occur until after we redeploy, we want to maximize the number of medics who obtain this badge.

The training is on both combat and medical skills. So while the classes will focus on preparing our medics for the EFMB, they will also be training on skills they can use every day.

I know everyone back home can't wait to see their loved ones.

Some of our medics are on their leave right now and those who are not are looking forward to their time to go back.

Thanks for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers. We will continue to keep you updated on everything we're doing here.

A/26, cont'd from pg. 7

superbly and did an excellent job representing A/26 FA and the 4th Inf. Div. Upon completion of the mission, they transferred radar operations over to another section and moved from Taji to Camp Liberty.

1st Section has been an integral part of the radar operations here at Camp Liberty.

Warrant Officer One Marvin Palmer, who joined the battery in July, leads the section. He has proven to be a stellar radar technician.

The section chief is Sgt. John Carey. Carey has been in the Battery since the summer and came from 1st Armored Division.

The section is further comprised of Sgt. Joel Lewis, Spc. Ronald Sampson, Spc. Gary Ferrell, Spc. Daniel Zupan and Pfc. Robert Hallas.

Along with the other radar sections, 1st Section has widened their battle focus beyond just tracking rounds.

Challenged by significant headway made in Section 2, site improvements have become a priority and as the summer begins to steadily creep in, 1st Section is looking to improve the shelter over their radar operations HMWWV and provide cover for their generators.

We are looking forward to seeing their hard work pay in huge dividends as the seasons change. In the meantime it has been a welcomed change of pace and a project worth rallying around as a section.

I would also like to point out some of the individual accomplishments of the soldiers as well.

Lewis has taken on the additional duty as our test, measure and diagnostic equipment non-commissioned officer. This job will require him to maintain the calibration of battery tools and equipment.

Our radar mechanic, Zupan, has been busy maintaining the radar and has spent many a late night on the hill installing parts and ensuring the radar is up and running.

He and Palmer have been doing a tremendous job as a result of their efforts.

All Soldiers, however, have been doing a great job manning our systems during 24 hour operations and deserve our sincere commendation on their performance.

Finally, as always I would like to thank everyone at home.

As we prepare for each month's rotation of environmental morale leave personnel, know that we keep each and everyone of you in our thoughts and prayers.

Each soldier in A/26 FA looks forward to his/her opportunity to enjoy two weeks of well deserved rest and relaxation.

Until that time comes, we will be thinking of all our loved ones back home!